10 Tough Facts About Combat

and what Leaders can do to mitigate risk and build Soldier resilience

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Mental Toughness

"Leaders must have strong minds, ready to accept facts as they are."

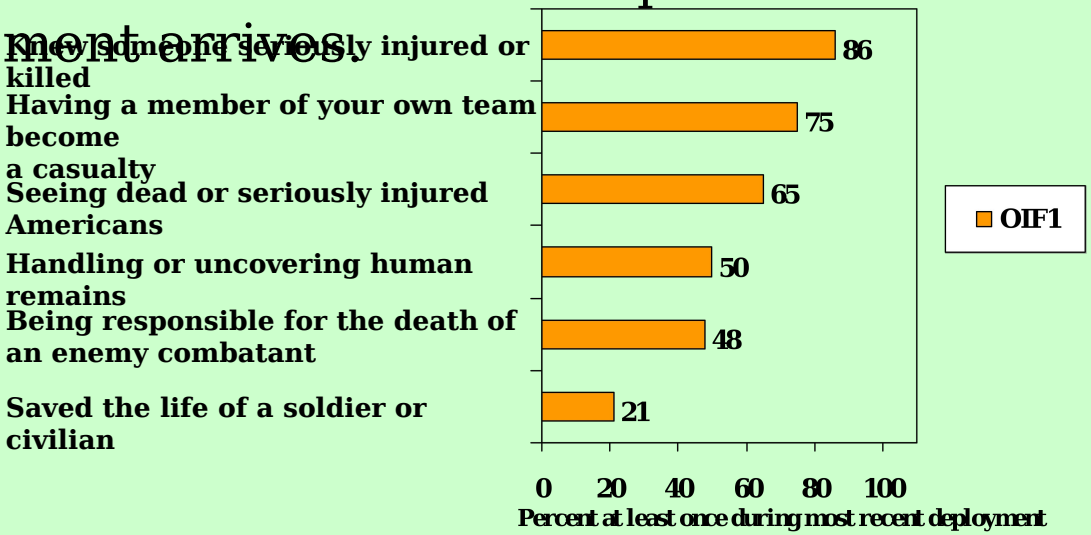
Harry S. Truman

President of the United States of America

The Nature of Combat

Realities of Combat:

- Combat is sudden, intense, and life threatening.
- It is the job of the Soldier to kill the enemy.
- Innocent women and children are often killed in combat.
- No Soldier knows how he will perform in combat until the moment arrives.



The Development of Battlemind: *"MTXE"*

What is battlemind?

A Soldier's inner strength to face adversity, fear, and hardship during combat with courage and confidence. It is the will to persevere and win. It is resilience.

Objectives of Battlemind:

To develop those factors (focusing on Leader behaviors) that contribute to the Soldier's will and spirit to fight and win in combat, thereby reducing **combat stress reactions**

"Rank has one object, to enable the officer [including the NCO] to fulfill his responsibilities ."

GEN Bruce Clark, 1963

Unpleasant Fact #1

Fear in combat is common.

Reality and Actions #1

Findings:

Over two-thirds of silver star recipients reported an increase in fear as the battle progressed.

Common symptoms of fear include: violent shaking or trembling, feeling weak, having cold sweats, and vomiting.

Fear and anxiety are reduced in combat when Soldiers engage in actions derived from their training experiences… Training kicks in.

What Leaders Can Do:

Drill and train Soldiers in specific actions to take under combat conditions.

Provide Soldiers sufficient time to recover physically and mentally from combat. Don't let "down time" become more stressful than combat patrols.

Admitting and joking about fear will release tension.

Battlemind Concept #1

Even heroes feel fear.

Unpleasant Fact #2

Unit members will be injured and killed.

Reality and Actions #2

Findings:

As of 8 Aug 2006, over 2,900 service members have been killed and over 20,000 service members have been wounded since OIF/OEF began.

Soldiers were angry when Leaders failed to show they cared about their combat experiences, especially ones involving injuries or death.

What Leaders Can Do:

Ensure that Soldiers don’t assume unnecessary risks when conducting missions.

Conduct mental health debriefings led by mental health professionals or chaplains. Soldiers report them to be helpful.

Conduct memorial services with the utmost respect and dignity.

Battlemind Concept #2

Every Soldier is entitled to go into combat with the best chance of survival that you as his or her leader can provide.

Unpleasant Fact #3

There will be communication and information breakdown.

Reality and Actions #3

Findings:

Soldiers report that deployment policies are often inconsistently applied.

Soldiers often report that they don't know the status of wounded Soldiers.

Soldiers make up rumors if leaders don't tell them the facts.

Telling soldiers you don't know is better than not telling them anything at all.

What Leaders Can Do:

Keep your Soldiers informed.

Make sure that your policies and views on all matters are clearly expressed and made known.

Let every Soldier in the unit know the status of wounded evacuees.

Battlemind Concept #3

Effective communication is the responsibility of the leader.

Unpleasant Fact #4

Soldiers frequently perceive failures in Leadership.

Reality and Actions #4

Findings:

Good leadership is linked to high Soldier morale and cohesion, and to fewer mental health problems.

Soldiers report that frequently leaders engage in actions to enhance their own career and personal well-being.

Soldiers also report that leaders often fail to exhibit clear thinking and reasonable action when under stress.

What Leaders Can Do:

Allow subordinates to seek clarification of orders or policies without being defensive or considering the Soldier disloyal.

Remove those subordinate leaders or Soldiers who fail to measure up. Reassign or demote them, you owe this to assure the success and safety of your Soldiers in combat.

Battlemind Concept #4

Courage and valor in combat are the true measures of Soldier and leader performance, never personal gain.

Unpleasant Fact #5

Combat impacts every Soldier mentally and emotionally.

Reality and Actions #5

Findings:

Combat stress reactions involve many symptoms (physical, mental, behavioral) and occur when a Soldier becomes overwhelmed with the stressors of combat.

- Over 95% of Soldiers who receive forward mental health support are returned to duty.
- Treatment in rear areas can lead to evacuation syndrome.

DMHS or CSC Units	**96%**
Combat Support Hospital-Iraq	**67%**
Combat Support Hospital-Kuwait	**11%**
LMRC Regional Medical Center	**4%**

What Leaders Can Do :

Ensure that Soldiers have access to mental health professionals as close to their unit as possible.

Conduct Buddy-Aid mental health training so Soldiers can assist other Soldiers in coping with the stress of combat.

Battlemind Concept #5

Combat stress reactions should be viewed as combat injuries.

Unpleasant Fact #6

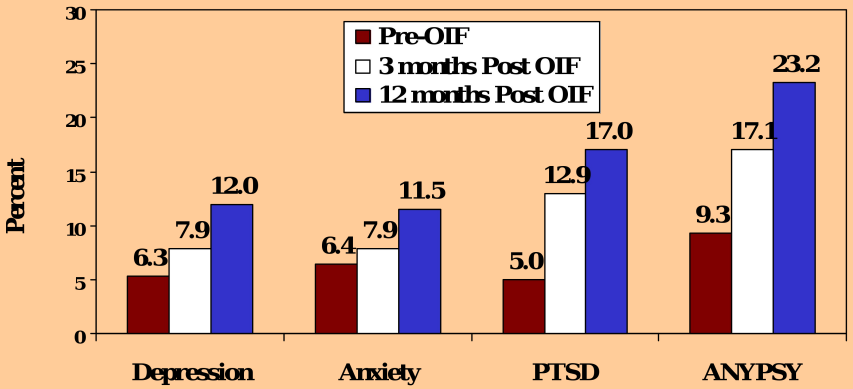
Combat often leads to lasting adverse mental health effects.

Reality and Actions #6

Findings:

PTSD symptoms are common after combat (10-20% of Soldiers) and often lead to excessive alcohol use and aggression.

Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) include: feeling tense and angry, nightmares, flashbacks, and inability to express feelings about traumatic events.



What Leaders Can Do:

Don't view PTSD as a disease but rather a fairly common result of combat.

Ensure that Soldiers get help, as earlier treatment leads to faster recovery.

Battlemind Concept #6

It takes courage to ask for mental health support.

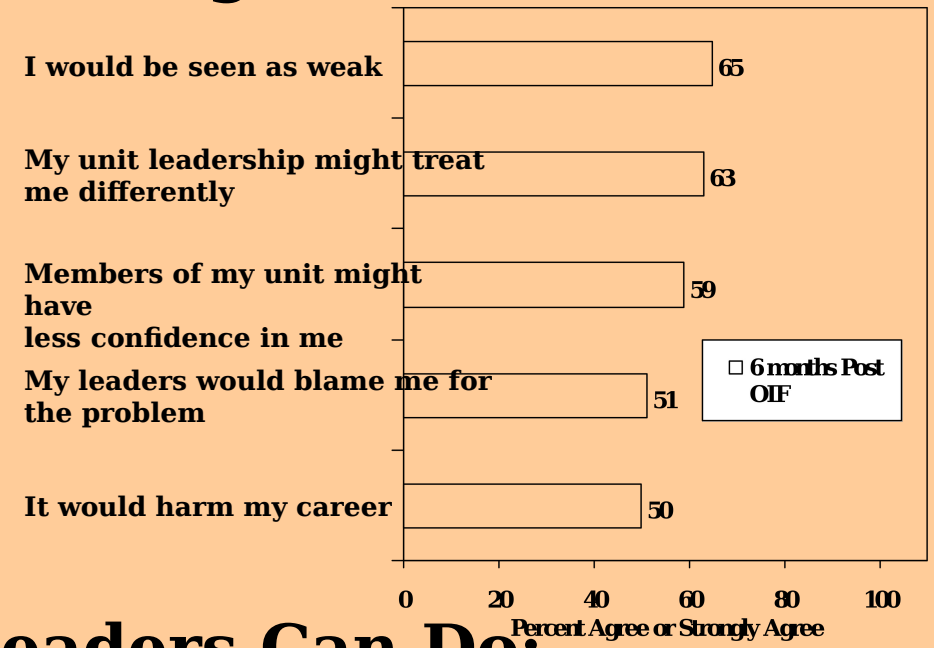
Unpleasant Fact #7

Soldiers are afraid to admit that they have a mental health problem.

Reality and Actions #7

Findings:

Only 25-40% of Soldiers with mental health problems get help because they report numerous stigmatizing beliefs regarding their unit members and leadership.



What Leaders Can Do:

Establish a command climate where leaders acknowledge that Soldiers are under stress and that they might need help.

Co-locate mental health assets at the battalion aid station/TMC.

Insist that mental health outreach be provided to each battalion.

Battlemind Concept #7

Admitting to a mental health problem is not a character flaw.

Unpleasant Fact #8

Deployments place a tremendous strain on families.

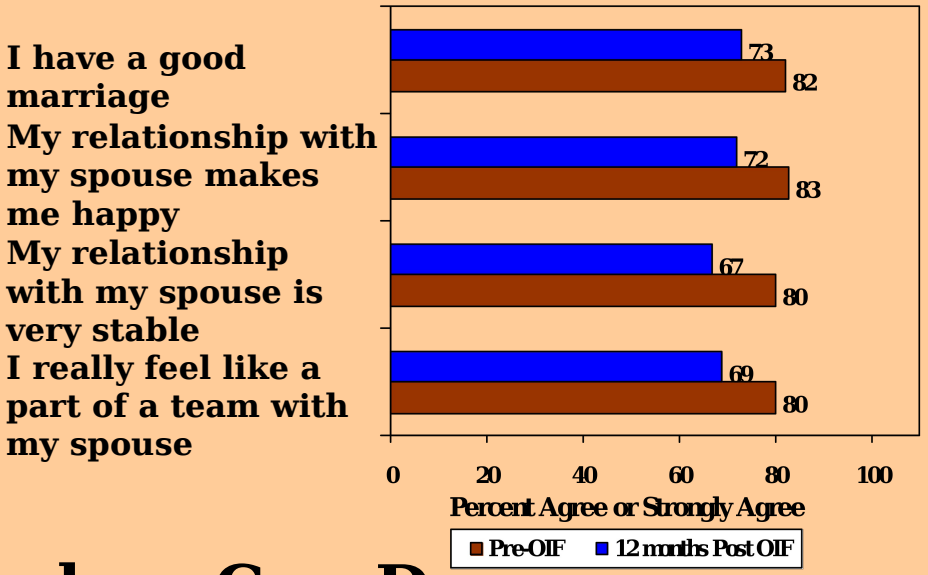
Reality and Actions #8

Findings:

Nearly one-fifth of all Soldiers deployed to OIF reported marital concerns or problems.

Marital satisfaction declined after deploying to OIF.

Soldiers generally report dissatisfaction with the FRG and rear detachment.



What Leaders Can Do:

Assess any reported problems in the FRG or rear detachment to ensure timely action.

Do not allow family problems to go unanswered. Assign at least one of your staff to serve as an ombudsman or expediter of family problems.

Formally recognize all special family occasions such as births and graduations.

Battlemind Concept #8

"When a Soldier is at war, his or her mind should be at peace."

Lord Moran, 1945

Unpleasant Fact #9

The combat environment is harsh and demanding.

Reality and Actions #9

Findings:

Soldiers' performance progressively deteriorates with less than 8 hours of sleep per day.

The combat environment (e.g., physical strain, heat, noise, lack of privacy) takes a toll on all Soldiers.

Soldiers are extremely sensitive to perceived inequalities in MWR resource distribution.

What Leaders Can Do:

Ensure adequate rest (>8 hours of sleep), hydration and other force health protections.

Insist on a fair distribution of MWR resources. Prevent double standards among officers, NCOs and Junior Enlisted Soldiers.

Be aware of the physical condition and sleep patterns of your Soldiers and insist that physical conditioning is maintained throughout the deployment.

Battlemind Concept #9

Recognize the limits of your Soldiers' fortitude.

Unpleasant Fact #10

Combat poses moral and ethical challenges.

Reality and Actions #10

Findings:

Combat exposes the reality of death.

Combat tests the character of Leaders and Soldiers.

What Leaders Can Do:

Reward and recognize Soldiers on a regular basis for their personal sacrifices. Tell them when they done a good job.

Do not allow harassment or mistreatment of your Soldiers.

Discuss the moral implications of Soldiers' behavior in combat, and how individual sacrifice contributes to the enduring freedom of fighting for America.

Battlemind Concept #10

Every Soldier needs to come home with a story that he or she can live with.

The American Soldier

"The capacity of Soldiers for absorbing punishment and enduring privations is almost inexhaustible so long as they believe they are getting a square deal, that their commanders are looking out for them, and that their own accomplishments are understood and appreciated."

GEN Dwight Eisenhower, 1944

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